

Grant Proposal Tips

PROPOSAL PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT THE CONCEPT PAPER

The grant seeker, should approach funding prospects to confirm an interest in a proposed project. Many federal agencies, foundations and specialists will review a brief concept paper before the formal proposal is prepared. The concept paper should include the following: a brief description of the needs to be addressed, list the project team, a statement of work, description of methods to be utilized, a project timeline, a method for project assessment, future plans for product, project costs, what is to be accomplished, project time line, a description of how your project relates to the funding source's mission, future funding needs and prospects.

The ideas and suggestions in this section are intended to serve as general guidelines. Although this material applies to most proposals, applicants should consult specific agencies or organizations regarding specific application guidelines.

OVERALL CONSIDERATIONS

An effective grant proposal should make a compelling case for funding and support and include most of the following, depending upon funding source:

- Follow guidelines such as prescribed format, necessary inclusions, deadlines.
- Develop a clear, descriptive project title.
- Review the proposal for cohesiveness, an important consideration when several people have been involved in its preparation;
- Use clear and concise language that is devoid of jargon and unfamiliar terminology.
- Provide a brief narrative for each section and place supporting data in an appendix.

Throughout the writing process, review and revise, but take care to ensure that the original project excitement does not get written out of the final document.

DEVELOPING THE PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The first step in proposal planning is the development of a clear, concise description of the proposed project. It is helpful to consider the project from the viewpoint of a potential funding source and ask the following questions:

- What need does this project address?
- Who benefits and how?
- What methods are being proposed to achieve these results?
- Are there other planned or current projects designed to meet these needs? How does this project differ? What is unique about it?
- How long will the project last? Is the timetable realistic?
- Can the proposed results be measured? Who will do the evaluation, and when?
- Can the project team do the work?

- Are there other funding sources?
- Will the proposal attract additional financial support?
- What are the plans for the project at the end of the grant?
- How much is being requested? What type of support is being requested: construction funds, salaries, equipment, operating expenses? Is the figure realistic?
- Is the proposal consistent with the funding source's stated goals, resources, and geographic restrictions?

Individuals without prior grant proposal writing experience may find it useful to attend a grantsmanship workshop.

PARTS OF THE PROPOSAL

Cover Letter

The cover letter should be written on the applicant's letterhead and should be signed by the organization's highest ranking official. Include a brief outline of the needs addressed in the proposal, demonstrate a familiarity with the mission of the grantmaking organization and emphasize how this project contributes to those goals.

A solid proposal package includes the following components: (1) proposal summary ; (2) introduction of organization; (3) problem statement (or needs assessment); (4) project objectives; (5) project methods or design; (6) project evaluation; (7) future funding; and (8) project budget.

Summary or Abstract

The summary should be brief -- no longer than two or three paragraphs. It is this document that becomes the cornerstone of your proposal. This section should include a description of the applicant, a definition of the problem to be solved, a statement of the objectives to be achieved, an outline of the activities and procedures to be used to accomplish those objectives, a description of the evaluation design, plans for the project at the end of the grant, and a statement of what it will cost the funding agency. The influence of the project both during and after the project period should be explained. The consequences of the project as a result of funding should be highlighted. Although the summary is placed at the beginning of the proposal, it should be saved until last so that it encompasses all key summary points necessary to communicate the project objectives.

Introduction

Describe your organization and demonstrate that you are qualified to carry out the proposed project. Provide a brief history of the organization, its mission, and its significant accomplishments. Describe the professional staff qualifications and list members of your board of directors. Discuss grants, endorsements, and press coverage the organization has already received. (Supporting documents can be included in the appendix.) Indicate whether additional funds are being sought elsewhere. Such information may, in fact, strengthen the proposal and demonstrate to the reviewing officer that all avenues of support have been thoroughly explored. Statements made here should be carefully tailored to the funding source, pointing out that the overall goals and purposes of the applicant are consistent with those of the funding source.

Problem Statement or Needs Assessment

This section describes the rationale for the project. It should provide evidence of a well-documented problem. The issue described should be of reasonable dimensions and the targeted population and geographic area should be clearly defined. This section should include a retrospective view of the situation, describe past efforts to ameliorate it, and projections for the future. The problem statement must be supported by statistics and statements from authorities in the field. You must describe how your organization's experience, skills and accomplishments enables it to solve the problem.

Objectives

Program objectives refer to specific project activities. It is necessary to identify all objectives and methods to be employed to accomplish the stated objectives. Consider quantities or things measurable and refer to the problem statement and the outcome of proposed activities when developing a well-stated objective. Set forth proposed solutions when possible in numerical terms such as the population to be served, time frame of the project, and specific outcomes

must be defined. These measurable objectives form the basis for judging the effectiveness of the program. It is important not to confuse objectives with methods.

Methods or Procedures

The description of methods or procedures builds upon the statement of the objectives. For each objective, a specific plan of action should be addressed. Delineate a sequence of justifiable activities and indicate the proposed staffing and timetable for each task. Make sure that your proposal contains realistic time and resource projections. Describe planned activities and related resources and necessary staff. Develop a flow chart of organizational project features. Describe interrelated parts of the project, where personnel will be needed, and what they are expected to do. Identify the kinds of facilities, transportation and support services required. Explain what will be achieved.

Evaluation

The evaluation component is two-fold: (1) project evaluation; and (2) process evaluation. Project evaluation addresses results that can be attributed to the project, as well as the extent to which the project has satisfied its desired objectives. Process evaluation addresses how the project was conducted in terms consistent with the stated plan of action and the effectiveness of the various activities within the plan. Your evaluation plan should be considered at every stage of proposal development. Data collected for the problem statement should help to determine whether measurable objectives can be met, proposed methods can be accomplished, or whether different parts of the plan should be revised. Methods of measurement will depend upon the nature and scope of the project. Procedures and schedules for gathering, analyzing, and reporting data will need to be spelled out.

Future Funding

The last narrative part of the proposal explains what will happen to the program upon project completion. This section should describe prior commitments of support for your project. Outline all other future fund-raising plans. Describe facilities and equipment operation and maintenance. Indicate whether income will be generated by the project, either in the form of service-based fees or marketable products. Describe a plan for continuation beyond the grant period, and/or the availability of other resources.

Budget

While budget detail may vary, a complete budget will reinforce the applicant's credibility and increase the likelihood of project funding. Every effort should be made to include realistic costs and time projections. Review the budget for cost effectiveness and refer the narrative if necessary.

Generally, budgets are divided into two categories: personnel costs and non-personnel costs. The personnel section usually includes a breakdown of salaries (including increases in multi-year projects), such fringe benefits as health insurance and Social Security, and consultant and contract services. The items in the non-personnel section may include facilities, utilities, equipment, office supplies, photocopying, insurance, postage, travel, etc.

Appendix

Lengthy documents cited in the narrative are best added to the proposal in the appendix. Examples include letters of endorsement, a partial list of previous funders, key staff resumes, annual reports, statistical data, maps, and newspaper and magazine articles about the organization. Nonprofit organizations should include an IRS 501(c)(3) Letter of Tax Exempt Status.